UNITED NATIONS

Daily Highlights

Department of Public Information • Central News Section • New York

Prepared by Central News

DH/2052
3 January 1996

WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* Secretary-General warns massive ethnic violence could explode in Burundi; asks Security Council to reconsider proposals for a preventive deployment of military guards and personnel.

* UNHCR food convoys reach northern Burundi for first time in 10 days.

* Secretary-General stresses importance of cooperation between UN and regional organizations; meets with Government officials in Cairo.

* Special Advisor Gharekhan in Western Sahara to assess progress in voter identification.

* Seminar to promote independent and pluralistic Arab media begins next Sunday in Yemen.

* * *

There was a real danger ethnic violence on a massive scale might explode in Burundi, according to Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. In a letter to the Security Council issued yesterday, the Secretary-General said the deteriorating situation was underscored by the decision of international organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the World Food Programme (WFP) and most non-governmental organizations to curtail their activities because of violent attacks against their personnel and assets. He had asked the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Sadako Ogata to travel immediately to Bujumbura for urgent discussions on ways to defuse the situation and enable international organizations to function effectively.

The Secretary-General said the Council might reconsider proposals he had made in August 1994, to maintain in Zaire, a military presence capable of intervening rapidly to prevent a repetition of the tragic events in Rwanda. He had also proposed the preventive deployment of miliary personnel and guards to protect humanitarian organization teams. He regretted that the High Commissioner of Human Rights did not yet have the funds to deploy human rights observers, despite repeated requests to potential donor Governments.

(more)

For information media—not an official record

Meanwhile, in Egypt, the Secretary-General was "extremely gratified" by the strong support given by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) for his proposals on Burundi, according to a United Nations spokesman.

* * *

A 26-truck convoy from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reached northern Burundi today, where 152,000 refugees and more than 80,000 internally displaced persons have been without food since humanitarian agencies evacuated staff because of security problems. According to a United Nations spokesman, the food deliveries -- the first for 10 days -- provided a very short breathing space. Access for humanitarian supplies must get to those in need, otherwise there was a danger of massive population movements from angry, hungry people, she said.

However, humanitarian aid was only a band-aid for terrible, simmering problems and could never be a substitute for political solutions, the spokesman continued. The Secretary-General had first brought the matter to the Security Council's attention in late 1994 and proposed a standby force in case humanitarian intervention was necessary. The President of Burundi had warned his country was on the brink of total collapse, and the international community should not remain passive witnesses to the deteriorating situation, she said.

* * *

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali underlined the importance of cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations when he visited the headquarters of the League of Arab States in Cairo, Egypt today. In his address, he drew attention to next month's meeting in New York between the heads of regional organizations.

The Secretary-General met with Egyptian Foreign Minister Amre Moussa, the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Esmat Abdel Meguid, the Chairman of the People's Assembly Foreign Affairs Committee, Mohamed Abdellah and the President of the Shoura Council, Moustafa Kamal Heimi.

This afternoon, he addressed a seminar organized by the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies on the role of the United Nations in the post Cold War era.

* * *

The Special Advisor to the Secretary-General, Chinmaya Gharekhan, is in Western Sahara assessing the situation and progress in the voter identification process. Mr. Gharekhan is expected to go to Rabat for meetings with Moroccan officials before travelling to Tindouf and to La'Youn where the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) is headquartered.

(more)

Mr. Gharekhan is due back in New York next week to report his findings to the Secretary-General. In a report last November, the Secretary-General said the identification of voters had come to a virtual halt and called for a new approach to carry the process forward. MINURSO's mandate is up for renewal at the end of January.

* * *

Some 100 journalists, media managers and information policy makers from the Arab world will participate in a five-day seminar, to promote an independent and pluralistic media in the region. The Seminar, which will begin next Sunday in Sana'a, Yemen, will evaluate the needs of the region's media professionals and consider the principles of freedom of expression and the free flow of information in the context of an Arab society.

The Seminar is being jointly organized by the United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in collaboration with the Government of Yemen. It will receive funding from France, the European Commission, the Danish International Development Agency and the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations.

* * *

Please note that the last line of the second paragraph in yesterday's Highlights should read:

> He noted that there was also a UN presence in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

* *** *